



A MESSAGE TO KAISER KIDNEY TRANSPLANT PATIENTS

HMO Help Center: 1- (888) HMO-2219

(Updated: May 19, 2006)

The Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC) is actively engaged in investigating and responding to issues recently reported in the media concerning the Northern California Kaiser Kidney Transplant Program, located at Kaiser's San Francisco Medical Center. At this time, we are focusing our efforts on ensuring patient safety and timely access to transplant services.

On May 12, 2006, there was a decision that Kaiser would be phasing out its kidney transplant program at its San Francisco Medical Center. We are currently working closely with Kaiser as well as the transplant organizations and regulatory agencies to establish a process by which there will be a safe and timely transition to transplant programs at UC San Francisco (UCSF) and UC Davis (UCD) UC Davis Medical Centers. More information concerning the details of this process will be available shortly.

However, we want patients to know that the DMHC stepped in to ensure that patients do not fall through the cracks. Patients should not be concerned that they will start the process all over at new transplant centers. We will be working with the national organ-sharing program (UNOS) to make sure that people retain their place on the appropriate waiting lists and don't lose any accrued waiting time.

While we can't give you specific information about your situation or medical advice, our HMO Help Center can give you general information to help you better understand the kidney transplant process and updates on the evolving situation at the Kaiser San Francisco Transplant Center.

Right now, what we know is that the waiting lists will be maintained by the National Database (UNOS), as before. If there is a possibility of a surgery during the transition period, it will be done at one of three facilities -- Kaiser San Francisco, UCSF or UCD. Patients will remain under the care of their Kaiser physician, no matter where a transplant is actually performed. But the bottom line is: **no surgeries will be delayed or denied because of the transition.**

Even before Kaiser decided to phase out its transplant center, the DMHC was investigating complaints it had received about the program. We've made significant progress on the complex issues involved in transitioning up to 2,000 Kaiser kidney patients to lists at the alternate facilities in the following areas:

- We've begun work on the transition plan outlining all the steps necessary for a successful transition, which we hope will be completed within six weeks.

- We have staff dedicated to helping Kaiser patients with general questions and also to liaison with Kaiser nephrology staff. Once the transition process begins, we will be following up with every patient to make sure that they are satisfied with their decided course of treatment.
- DMHC auditors are also conducting our own investigation to see if Kaiser violated any part of California law dealing with the rights of HMO patients when they originally set up its kidney program. These rights include access to continuing care for a person with a chronic condition such as kidney disease, and accessibility to necessary treatment. We have not ruled out any future fines and penalties for any violations of the law during the course of Kaiser's operation of its program.

Once again, we would like patients to understand that we are working as quickly as possible to complete the complex transition process. With the DMHC's involvement, every patient should be assured that they will not lose accrued waiting time or otherwise be penalized because of the closure of the Kaiser kidney center.

Although Kaiser has its own 800 number, patients should also be aware that the HMO Help Center can answer questions or take complaints about any service provided by Kaiser at 1-(888) HMO-2219. **We are an independent advocate to protect your health care rights.**